

Environmental & Safety Standards and Ethics

For

Expeditions on the Tatshenshini and Alsek Rivers

1996

These standards represent the most current practices applicable to the river corridors. They have been assembled by concerned professional outfitters, from comments from private boaters, and the managing agencies. Proper practices will ensure that each succeeding generation of travelers will be able to enjoy a relatively "untouched" appearance of the river.

The concerns fell into five basic categories:

1. Site Impacts
2. Interaction with Others
3. Interaction with and impacts on wildlife
4. Safety
5. Cultural Considerations

Site Impacts

Human Waste

The combination of maximum traffic in the river corridor and an environment that does not promote the speedy decomposition of waste creates a problem. It is mandatory that solid waste be packed out and disposed of in a proper manner. There is a human waste dump station at the take-out in Dry Bay and dump stations are also available in Haines, Haines Junction, Whitehorse and Juneau. For all expeditions ending in Dry Bay, all solid waste must be kept in a liquid/semi-liquid state. Biodegradable deodorants are OK, but no bleach or other toxic, formaldehyde-based or bacteria destroying chemicals are allowed (these destroy the bacterial action in the septic system). Toilet paper may be burned in a very hot fire or carried out with the solid waste and disposed of at the dump station. Urinating on the land does not present the same problems as solid waste. Do so away from the camp areas and preferably below the high water line so that the area is flushed annually.

Fires, Fire Rings and Firewood

Regulations specify that fire pans or boxes must be used to contain any fires built within 1/2 mile (800 m) of the river. Fires should not be positioned near large rocks, rock walls nor logs as they leave long lasting scars. There should be no evidence of fire rings along the river. If you find someone else's fire ring, please remove it and toss any scarred rocks into the river.

While "warming fires" continue to be part of the river experience, the use of stoves is recommended for cooking to minimize impacts. Check with your air carrier regarding flight requirements for fuels. Dutch ovens should be heated on mini-size pans. Carry and fly out any unused fuels.

All parties who utilize camp fires should collect wood from drift piles while traveling on the river and bring it to camp if staying at popular campsites. Regulations prohibit cutting dead limbs from trees - only dead and down trees and driftwood may be used for fires.

Maintain your fire so as not to leave large pieces of charred wood. Any larger pieces of charred wood should be taken to the next camp and used. If this isn't possible, it should be thrown out into the main river current. Fine ash should be dumped out in the main current as well.

Surplus firewood should not be left in a pile. It should either be carried to the next camp, laid out along the beach in a natural waterline fashion, or thrown out into the main current. At the Dry Bay take-out, wood should be left in compact piles.

Alterations of the Environment

A growing problem is the proliferation of rings of stones used as tent anchors. There are high winds along these river corridors, but with the use of strong 12" tent pegs or spikes, there should be no need to move rock to anchor tents. If stones are moved for any purpose they should be loose river stones - and they should be returned when camp is broken. The moving of stones destroys vegetation and other organisms. It is recommended the planks, lawn chairs and other imported items be used for seating and other purposes.

Outfitters and others have noticed that the initial impacts to a campsite happen quickly by trampling of the fragile vegetation. The spots hardest hit are landings, kitchen areas, and paths linking tents. Unless a group is very small, it is better to use a previously established camp site rather than impacting an untouched area. Sticking to existing pathways and placing tents in an existing site is helpful. Avoid wearing lug soled boots in camp. High traffic areas such as kitchens should be located on sand/gravel or other non-vegetated sites.

If hiking on an existing trail, do not short cut. This causes unnecessary damage to the vegetation and soil. Other routes should be on level, dry ground, on rock, sand or gravel. Hike in small groups and avoid wet erodable, vegetated areas.

Group sizes are limited to 15 persons, with the exception of some commercial operators who are currently permitted to operate with up to 25 persons.

Garbage

Conscientious garbage management is critical to avoid bear encounters with your group and the people who camp in your site the following nights. **All garbage must be taken to Dry Bay and flown out with you.**

Proper garbage management begins with thorough pre-planning to minimize garbage and odor. Plan menus carefully to avoid leftovers and odiferous foods. Nothing is buried, nothing stays on the land and only strained liquid go into the river. Carry out washed foil, other metals and heavy plastics. Organics/food scraps can be burned in a hot fire and what's left carried out in a sealed aroma-proof container. All strained dishwater and other gray water goes into the river rather than concentrating the food smells on shore. Oil or grease such as bacon grease must either be flared off in a hot fire or carried out in a sealed container.

Remember – it is up to you to manage your garbage in order to maintain a wilderness environment and to prevent bear encounters with your group or following groups.

Interaction With Others

With a limited season and the popularity of these rivers it is critical that all river users adhere strictly to the scheduling regulations. The permit date is the date for taking out at Dry Bay. We suggest scheduling your air taxi for the following day to allow time for packing and to enjoy Dry Bay.

Upper Alsek: Limit of one night between Dezadeash/Kaskawulsh confluence and Lowell Lake.

Goatherd (upper Alsek): Floaters must check with Kluane National Park. Part of this area may be closed due to bear management.

Sediments Creek: Limit of two nights. Commercial trips must not stop if two other commercial trips are already at the site. Be prepared for other rafters stopping to hike and/or camp at this campsite.

Walker Glacier, Alsek Spit/Peninsula, Gateway Knob: May stay two nights at one of these three sites. Limited to one night at the other two. Be prepared for other rafters stopping to hike and/or camp at Walker Glacier.

Please consider the other groups at your site. Reasonable “quiet hours” and positive group interaction will enhance everyone's experience. Parties that “leapfrog” each other should communicate to work out their respective schedules.

Sensitivity should be exercised with respect to air access (Turnback Canyon, Lowell Lake) as well as fly-overs to and from Dry Bay. Ask the pilot to maintain a minimum

altitude of 2000' above the river, and not to fly along the river if possible. Commercial flight services companies are required to have a park use permit to land in the parks.

Interaction With And Impacts On Wildlife

The Tatshenshini-Alsek corridor has a large and diverse bear population. Grizzly bears in the interior and brown bears on the coast are common. Black bears, sometimes in the rare glacier or “blue” color phase, are also along the river.

Visitors to the river should realize that by pushing the limits of an animals “comfort zone” you may be causing stress to that animal and also make the animal more wary of the next visitor. Use spotting scopes, binoculars and telephoto lenses to get good views and photos.

By keeping a clean camp and observing a few basic precautions you can minimize the chance of having a negative experience with bears or other wildlife. Remember that be habituating bears to human foods and odors you may indirectly cause that bear’s death. Bear encounters are “people problems” not “bear problems.” Avoid camping in bear habitat. Look for signs of recent bear activity in any proposed campsite. Watch for bear tracks, droppings, signs of recent grazing, dug-up ground, wildlife trails and salmon spawning area. When hiking make lots of noise (singing , bells, etc.), avoid brushy areas and “blind” areas.

All food, cooking utensils, garbage and any other items that would smell interesting to a bear (toothpaste, soap and lotion) must be packed separately from your other camping gear, preferably in a bear resistant and/or aroma-proof container, and cached a good distance from you campsite. The only time food should not be cached is when you are actually preparing and eating a meal. Minimize odors by your choice

Cache options used by rafters include:

- Tightly sealed containers in a raft located away from camp.
- Tightly sealed containers on the shore away from camp.
- Where trees are present, suspended at least ten feet off the ground and four feet from the tree trunk, and away from camp.

Safety

The Tatshenshini and Alsek Rivers flow through a rigorous and demanding environment. The cold water, unpredictable turbulence, large water volume and extreme weather conditions all place high demands on safety equipment, systems and knowledge. Hypothermia can kill in a very short time.

Each group must have experienced leaders. Every group should have a leader trained in basic Trauma Life Support, river rescue, cold weather survival and wilderness group leadership. Each boat requires a skilled leader with training and experience specific to their craft in class IV whitewater (international scale, class I-VI).

Suggested equipment: rafts, 12' or larger. Class III or V PFD's (1 per person and 1 per boat). PFD's should be worn at all times. Rigid kayaks and whitewater canoes with flotation are suitable for the river provided the paddler is skilled in navigating Class III/IV water. Folding kayaks and open canoes are not recommended. Currently the only available aircraft to fly rigid kayaks or canoes are Canadian companies that can only fly between Dry Bay and a Canadian destination due to customs requirements.

Emergency signalling equipment such as personal locator beacon, single-side band aircraft radio with appropriate channels are required for all outfitted groups and should be carried by any group on the river. Aircraft radios are unlikely to work on the upper Alsek.

Comprehensive first aid kits for advanced wilderness first aid are essential. Rescue equipment including carabiners, pulleys, rope and prussics (and the ability to use them) should be on each trip.

Plan to treat all drinking water with a mechanical or chemical system that is sufficient to remove giardia.

Firearms

The carrying of firearms for protection purposes has not been shown to be effective in bear encounters. If you feel you must carry a firearm, be aware that restrictions apply. The applicable regulations are:

No handguns may be brought into Canada.

Possession of any firearm in Kluane National Park is prohibited.

Possession of a rifle or shotgun in Tatshenshini-Alsek Park is strictly limited to licenses individuals.

Firearms are allowed in the area of Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve along the Alsek River.

The use of bear spray (OC or pepper spray) and air horns are suggested as a deterrent to bears in close encounters. Please check customs regulations for transport across the border. If you plan to fly with bear spray, you need to check with your flight company.

Cultural Considerations

Throughout the Canadian portion of a Tatshenshini or Alsek River trip, travelers are in the traditional lands of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations (Southern Tutchone and Tlingit origin). This includes lands within the province of British Columbia that have recently been declared a provincial park. Within the Yukon and British Columbia, the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations own large areas of rural land and have

management and other interests in neighboring lands. The Alaska portion of the river trip lies within the traditional lands of the Tlingit. You are guests on their traditional lands.

In the nineteenth century, numerous aboriginal fishing villages were located along the Tatshenshini River and lower Alsek River. Klukshu, Yukon is the only aboriginal fishing village still occupied. Visitors are encouraged to visit Klukshu prior to their river departures to learn something of the area's rich aboriginal cultural heritage. Close to Sha'washe (Dalton Post) at KM 163 on the Haines road, an interpretive display on the basin's human history is available for viewing.

The departure point for most Tatshenshini River trips is at Sha'washe (Dalton Post). Sha'washe is on lands owned by the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. Visitors must respect their land use regulations and requirements. Archeological studies of the Alsek and Tatshenshini river corridors have only recently begun. If a visitor comes across a site or artifacts of cultural significance which they believe is not widely known, they are encouraged to report its location to one of the river management agencies. **It is an offense to dig or disturb any cultural/archeological site or artifact.**